

Former NIEHS research fellow enters medical school

By Robin Arnette

As a child, former NIEHS research fellow Quiana Childress couldn't have imagined the twists and turns her life would take when she decided she wanted to be a doctor, but on May 6, she will be closer than ever to becoming a physician.

That's because Childress will begin the first day of coursework at [Ross University School of Medicine \(RUSM\)](http://www.rossu.edu/medical-school/) (<http://www.rossu.edu/medical-school/>) in the West Indies as a member of its 2013 incoming summer class. Her acceptance into medical school marks the end of an arduous journey, but the beginning of a potentially long, fulfilling career in medicine.

Linked Video

[Watch as current and former students talk about their experience at Ross University School of Medicine \(01:31\)](#)

Will to succeed

Childress grew up in a large family where money was tight. To help out, she worked after school as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and decorated birdhouses. Eventually, Childress found her self homeless, but even these circumstances didn't deter her. She received good grades in school, tutored elementary kids, and served as captain of her varsity basketball team.

After graduating from high school, she spent a year completing a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program, which allowed her to pay her way through college at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). Working as an LPN at an all-male maximum security prison and majoring in biology both presented challenges, but Childress' resolve and excellent time management skills permitted her to also volunteer for local and national organizations, help charter two student groups on campus, and participate in undergraduate research programs offered by the University of Alaska Anchorage, Yale University School of Medicine, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Through it all, she maintained a 3.9 GPA.

"As a first-generation, working college student, I encountered bumps along the road," Childress said, "but each new experience strengthened me and compelled me to keep pressing on."

When Childress graduated summa cum laude from UAPB in May 2010, she had the honor of hearing First Lady Michelle Obama mention her name during the commencement address. Mrs. Obama used Childress' life story to inspire others to never give up, no matter the adversity.

Research and medicine

Childress spent the next two years doing biomedical research, both at NIEHS and at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn. During her time at the Institute, Childress worked with NIEHS Acting Clinical Director Stavros Garantziotis, M.D., investigating lung transplant rejection. At Meharry, she earned a graduate certificate in health sciences and studied how vascular signaling regulates nitric oxide production. While Childress may engage in some research at RUSM, her sights are set on mastering the information needed to land a good residency program.

Standing on the shoulders of others

As a testament to her superb work ethic, Ross University selected Childress to receive the [Eliza Anna Grier](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography_132.html) (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography_132.html) Scholarship, named in honor of the first African-American woman licensed to practice medicine in Georgia. Grier was an emancipated slave who took 14 years, alternating years of picking cotton and attending school, to obtain her M.D. from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. When she finished in 1897, Grier returned to her hometown of Atlanta to provide medical care to the city's African-American community.

The Grier scholarship will cover \$2,000 of the cost of tuition per semester and is renewable as long as Childress is continuously enrolled and maintains a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA.

According to Carey James, associate dean and director of admissions at RUSM, the school has had more graduates obtain U.S. residencies over the last five years than any other medical school in the world. He attributes most of the credit to students who are relentless in the pursuit of their career aims.



"The prayers and help from countless family, friends, mentors, and supporters have allowed me to make it this far in life, and I am overjoyed that RUSM will allow me the opportunity to pursue my dreams of becoming a physician," Childress said. (Photo courtesy of Crafted Eye Photography)

“A talented student like Quiana perfectly fits the profile of an RUSM student, who has both immeasurable potential, as well as a strong personal commitment to achieving her goals, regardless of the obstacles in her way,” James said. “We are proud to welcome her to the RUSM community.”

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